

WILDLIFE

Improving highways for people and wildlife

76 Number, in thousands, of anglers, hunters, state parks visitors, and boaters contacted by FWP game wardens in 2017*

*Most recent available figure

1,000,000 species at risk

Roughly 1 million plant and animal species, including the pallid sturgeon in Montana, are on the verge of extinction, according to a United Nations report released in May. The findings depict “an ominous picture,” says Robert Watson, chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which compiled the assessment.

The landmark report by seven co-authors from universities around the world points to overfishing and warming sea waters as the major contributors to species loss. On land, the primary threat is the rapid destruction of habitat from human population growth. The world’s population has tripled since 1950, and urban areas have doubled in size since 1992. By mid-century, the world’s population of 7.7 billion is expected to approach 9 billion.

The ramifications of species extinction to humans include a collapse of ocean fisheries and severe declines in crop production from the loss of pollinating insects. Habitat destruction that threatens many species also threatens human survival. Between 100 million and 300 million people now face “increased risk of floods and hurricanes because of loss of coastal habitats and protection,” the report says. ■



Woodland caribou: almost extinct in the Lower 48.

Last year, 1 in 57 Montana drivers hit a deer, according to a 2018 State Farm Insurance report. With the second-highest rate of deer-vehicle collisions per capita (West Virginia is in first place), Montana wants to see that number reduced. Now state agencies and concerned citizens are working to make that happen.

Last December, 160 people gathered in Helena to participate in Montana’s first Wildlife and Transportation Summit. The two-day meeting was conducted by FWP, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), the Governor’s Office, and Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage. The meeting was the first step in forming partnerships among agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities.

The summit’s goal was for participants to share information and develop solutions to make the state’s highways safer for people

and more permeable for wildlife.

“Wildlife migrations are especially susceptible to some of the big changes facing conservation as our state population grows, land use changes, and the complicating impacts of a changing climate unfold,” Governor Steve Bullock said in his opening remarks. “There’s a need for us to develop practical solutions that help build resilience to these changes and improve connectivity for wildlife. We need strategies to adapt our existing infrastructure and to plan for the future.”

Summit participants said one important outcome of the meeting was that MDT and FWP agreed to work more closely to address wildlife and transportation issues. This could eventually include what highway professionals call “wildlife accommodation” projects, such as installing over- or underpasses, warning signs, wildlife-exclusion barriers, or wildlife-friendly fencing. ■



Governor Steve Bullock addresses participants of Montana’s first Wildlife and Transportation Summit. The goal of the two-day meeting was to find ways to make the state’s highways safer for people and more permeable for wildlife.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CARTOON BY MIKE MORAN; LON E. LAUBER, LIKED DURING MONTANA OUTDOORS; SHUTTERSTOCK; SHUTTERSTOCK; MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

FISHING

Anglers encouraged to catch native trout in western states

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies is inviting anglers of all levels to participate in the Western Native Trout Challenge. In addition to earning bragging rights at various levels of achievement, participants will help the association’s Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) conserve 21 species of native trout.

“The Western Native Trout Challenge highlights the importance of native fish management and demonstrates the sport-fishing opportunities provided by recovered native fish populations,” says Eileen Ryce, head of FWP’s Fisheries Division.

Montana is one of 12 western states participating. Others include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. In addition to state conservation agencies such as FWP, partners include the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Trout Unlimited.

Anglers can take part in the challenge by catching native trout using flies or lures in participating states. Participants who catch six trout species across four states will earn an Expert Caster certificate. Those who catch 12 trout species across eight states will be certified as an Advanced Caster. Catching 18 species across all 12 states will earn anglers a Master Caster certification.

To learn which fish to catch and where in each state to find them, visit WesternNativeTroutChallenge.org. The participation fee is \$25 per adult (free for anglers age 17 and under). Ninety-two percent of the fee will go toward native trout conservation and restoration work across the West. ■

Follow the action on: Twitter: #WesternNativeTrout; Instagram: @WesternNativeTrout; and FaceBook: /westernnativetrout.



People still trust wildlife agencies

A new study by Colorado State University finds that people still have faith in wildlife agencies such as FWP. Titled “America’s Wildlife Values,” the study looked state by state and nationwide at what people think about wildlife and the way it is managed. Researchers found that respect and trust for wildlife managers was far greater than for other public employees. Nationwide, 70 percent of survey respondents trusted wildlife agencies such as FWP most or all the time, compared to 43 percent who had faith in state government in general. The federal government trust rate was 22 percent.

The study also describes public attitudes toward wildlife, such as whether it should be used by humans or allowed to coexist with us.

“The study shows that Montanans overwhelmingly believe our agency works hard at obtaining public input, and they also believe that we care about what the public wants,” says FWP director Martha Williams. “Those are major factors contributing to the faith they put in us and our decisions.” ■

